

# *Healing, Translating, Collecting. Doctor Michelangelo Tilli across the Ottoman Empire (1683–85)*

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## Abstract

*The article is based on the correspondence between doctor Michelangelo Tilli, the secretary of Granduke Cosimo III de' Medici in Florence and doctor Francesco Redi head physician at the Medici Court and a leading scientist in Europe. Michelangelo Tilli (1655-1750) a young physician graduated from the university of Pisa, between 1683 and 1685 travelled to the Ottoman Empire with the official charge of treating Mustafa pasha "Mussaip", grand admiral of the Turkish fleet and son in law of Sultan Mehmed IV. It was a relevant diplomatic and political move to send a promising physician to treat the Pasha during the crucial military campaign of the Turks in Central Europe against the Holy League while Christian armies were confronting the last Ottoman attack to Vienna and Hungary. From Istanbul Tilli travelled to Belgrade and back, while the Ottomans were at war with the Hapsburg Empire. The catastrophic consequences of the siege of Vienna in September 1683 resonate in his letters and reports, to date unpublished among the literature on these events. Tilli's letters intersect political and diplomatic information with medical therapy, botanical observation and the search for antiquities, showing the plurality of functions performed by early modern medical practitioners across imperial boundaries.*

Keywords: Medici court, Ottoman Empire, Siege of Vienna, Circulation of knowledge, Medical therapy.

Have you begun to stammer the Turkish language? I hope so. Please concentrate and make all possible efforts: try to learn it at all costs. The Grand Duke has asked me repeatedly if you are learning it so that you will be fluent in Turkish when you come back. I have always replied that I have unfailing trust in your capacities.<sup>1</sup>

The author of this letter sent from Florence to Constantinople on 19 November 1683 is doctor Francesco Redi (1626–1698), head physician at the Medici court in Florence and one of Europe's leading scientists in Galileo's tradition. The letter is addressed to one of his closest pupils, doctor Michelangelo Tilli in Constantinople. Reading on, we understand why learning Turkish was crucially important:

How are you going to observe animals, plants, soil and all that is part of natural history?  
How will you understand the medical treatments currently used by doctors in that

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<sup>1</sup> Francesco Redi, *Lettere* (Firenze: stamperia Magheri, 1825), 73.

country? What method do they follow? And what about food? Do the courtiers and high-standing officials have sumptuous and delicious banquets? I would appreciate if you could send me a few recipes of some especially popular dishes in Turkey, as well as some recipes of cakes and other delicacies.<sup>2</sup>

Healing, observing, tasting, communicating and possibly collecting both *naturalia* and antiquities required translating between languages and across cultures. These practices are at the core of the dense correspondence between Apollonio Bassetti, the secretary of Grand Duke Cosimo III in Florence, doctor Francesco Redi, and Michelangelo Tilli (1655–1750) a twenty-seven-year-old physician, graduate of the university of Pisa, who between 1683 and 1685 travelled to the Ottoman Empire with the official charge of treating Musahib Mustafa Paşa, son in law of Sultan Mehmed IV having married his daughter Hatice Sultan in 1675. He was a son of a Süleyman Agha and had received his education in the Inner Palace before becoming Sultan Mehmed IV's companion and favourite (*musahib* – hence the nickname). In 1666 he was named a second vizier and in 1673 the Deputy of the Imperial Stirrup. In 1683–1684 he acted as the Grand Admiral of the Fleet, as well as the commander in Morea.<sup>3</sup> It was a relevant diplomatic and political move to send a promising young physician to treat the Paşa during the crucial military campaign of the Turks in Central Europe against the Holy League. When Tilli arrived in Istanbul, the Ottomans were at war with the Habsburg Empire, and the catastrophic consequences of the failed siege of Vienna in September 1683 resonate in his letters and reports to date unpublished among the abundant literature on these events. Indeed, the doctor's letters interspersing political and diplomatic information with medical therapy, botanical observation and the search for antiquities show 'the plurality of functions performed by early modern medical practitioners'.<sup>4</sup> Tilli's letters and reports contribute to the cultural and linguistic mediation that characterizes the multilingual textual production of 'trans imperial subjects'. Nathalie Rothman among others posits this dialogical practice of translation involving Ottoman and European interlocutors at the origin of an emerging pre-Enlightenment Orientalism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Tilli's frequent conversations with Ottoman teachers and learned men, scrutinizing their libraries and manuscripts; his profound interest for the training of

<sup>2</sup> Francesco Redi, *Lettere*, 73–4.

<sup>3</sup> *Mehmed Süreyya, Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 4, ed. Nuri Akbayar, translated by Seyit Ali Kahraman (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 1203. He died in 1686, at the age of around 40. He composed poems in Arabic and Persian and apparently was a talented musician.

<sup>4</sup> A comment on apothecaries' shops as centres of information and sociability is in Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti, *Atti e memorie inedite dell'Accademia del Cimento* (Firenze, 1780), t. III, 109 "giacché in que' tempi, non vi essendo i caffè, né tanti ridoti, i crocchi de' galantuomini, e de' nobili ancora, si facevano nelle spezierie e nelle botteghe de' librai"; Filippo De Vivo, 'Pharmacies as centres of communication in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 4 (2007): 506.

<sup>5</sup> E. Nathalie Rothman, 'Dragomans and "Turkish Literature": The Making of a Field of Inquiry', *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova Serie, 93 (2013): 390–421; John Paul Ghobrial, 'The Archive of Orientalism and its Keepers: Re-imagining the Histories of Arabic Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe', *Past and Present* (2016) Supplement 11: 90–111.

local physicians and the circulation of knowledge across the Mediterranean highlight this shared dialogic approach in his correspondence. Recent research is shedding light on traditions of knowledge moving across the Mediterranean and on the transnational construction of an Oriental library in Europe in which the role of linguistic and diplomatic agents is crucial.<sup>6</sup> In this perspective, this paper focuses on the work of scientists and physicians that needs to receive a broader scholarly attention. European doctors were in high demand in the Ottoman Empire: Tilli's mission was part of a long-standing tradition of physicians trained in Padua or Pisa moving to the Ottoman lands. A few years before Tilli's arrival in Constantinople, Giovanni Mascellini was the European diplomats' doctor before being employed by the Grand Mufti 'whose disease', Mascellini wrote to Florence, 'has degenerated owing to the ill treatments of some barbarous Turkish surgeon.'<sup>7</sup> Having a European doctor was a mark of status, and some travellers mention, with a note of irony, that an easy way of getting around in Ottoman society was pretending to be a doctor, as there was a widespread belief in the excellent medical knowledge of all Europeans.<sup>8</sup>

Three contexts on different scales shape Tilli's activity. Letters and correspondents travelling from Tuscany to the Ottoman Empire; Venetian and European diplomatic, political and academic networks and institutions; the making of a pre-Enlightenment Oriental archive between Florence, Paris, Venice and Constantinople. The war between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans and the second siege of Vienna provide the crucial and dramatic backdrop for the story, marking a turning point in the history of the early modern world. Within these overlapping

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<sup>6</sup> Emrah Safa Gurkan, 'Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600', *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no.2/3 (2015): 107-28; Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Islamic Letters* (Cambridge- London: Harvard University Press, 2018); Pier Mattia Tommasino, 'Lire et traduire le Coran dans le Grand-Duché de Toscane', *Dix-septième siècle*, 268, no.3 (2015): 459-80; Anastasia Stouraiti, 'Printing Empire: Visual Culture and the Imperial Archive in Seventeenth Century Venice', *The Historical Journal* 59, no.3 (2016): 635-68; Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ghobrial, 'The Archive of Orientalism'; .

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Vatamanu, 'Contribution à l'étude de la vie et l'oeuvre de Giovanni Mascellini médecin et secrétaire princier', *Revue des Etudes Sud Est Européennes*, XVI, no.2 (1978): 269-87.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on Italian doctors in the Ottoman Empire, see Cristian Luca, 'Contributi alla biografia dei medici Jacopo Pylarino (1659-1718) e Bartolomeo Ferrati (?-1738)', in *Vocația istoriei. Prinos profesorului Șerban Papacostea*, eds Ovidiu Cristea and Gheorghe Lazăr (Brăila: Editura Istros, 2008), 635-52; Francesca Lucchetta, 'Il medico del Bailaggio di Costantinopoli: fra terapie e politica (secc.XV-XVI)', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 15, Supplemento al n.15 *Veneziani in Levante, Musulmani a Venezia*, (1997): 5-50; on some European doctors see Cristian Luca, 'The professional élite in mid-seventeenth century Constantinople: the Danish physician Hans Andersen Skovgaard (1604-1656) in the last decade of his life and career', in *Social and Political Elites in Eastern and Central Europe (15th-18th centuries)*, eds Cristian Luca, Laurentiu Ravdan and Alexandru Simon (UCL, Studies in Russia and Eastern Europe No.12, 2015), 147-56.

contexts, the narrative of one correspondent – Michelangelo Tilli – provides the analytical angle, the *micro*<sup>9</sup> as it were, from which we now begin.

### From Livorno to Constantinople

Leaving from Livorno on a Dutch vessel on 2 February 1683 accompanied by surgeon Pasquali, Tilli arrived in Smyrna on 1 April. The secretary of Grand Duke Cosimo III had given him precise information concerning credit to be paid by local merchants and adequate clothing for both men ‘according to local custom as well as that of the Franks, so that they can look good in Constantinople.’<sup>10</sup> Informal instructions were also given, and they highlight the overlapping aims of the charge, as well as a broader transfer of objects, animals and slaves through the gift-giving that the mission entailed. ‘His Highness told me to let you know,’ writes the secretary, ‘that were the Paşa willing to offer gifts, a nice antique Greek or Latin marble or bronze statue would be highly appreciated, or Greek and Latin coins, as we know that there are many such antiquities especially in Asia where they are found daily, and the Turks do not care about them.’<sup>11</sup> But the desired gifts were not only classical antiquities but also ‘positional goods’ in present-day Ottoman society: ‘What the Grand Duke would value immensely,’ continues the Florentine secretary, ‘are some handsome Turkish horses or a young, good looking and good natured Circassian slave to be trained in the service of His Highness. I insist that he must be a native of Circassia and of no other nation, as those who sell them often disguise them as Circassians, when they are actually Greeks, Albanians and Slavs, whom we do not want, as they do not train well.’<sup>12</sup>

A diplomatic network is organised to help the doctor travel from Smyrna to Constantinople. He does not know where his patient, Paşa Mussaïp, resides, as the war might have moved him away from the capital city to Adrianople (Edirne) or Belgrade. Tuscany did not have a consul in Constantinople and therefore had to rely on an extensive web of protections granted by the Venetian Bailo Giambattista Donà<sup>13</sup> and by Dutch, British and French diplomats. In Smyrna the French consul grants protection to merchants from Livorno and, with some regret, Tilli notes that ‘consuls in this city are considered highly, more than in Italian ports, and I think they occupy an eminent position, between that of ambassador and consul. Even Capuchins and Jesuits that live here abide by his decisions and serve him with great respect.’<sup>14</sup> In Smyrna the physician and surgeon change their attire: clothes are being made to fit in with Turkish fashion, while not completely hiding their European identity. Jewish

<sup>9</sup> Christian G. De Vito, ‘Verso una microstoria translocale (micro-spatial history)’ *Quaderni Storici*, 150, no. 3 (2015): 815-833; Francesca Trivellato, ‘Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?’ *California Studies*, 2, no.1(2011) <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>.

<sup>10</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Mediceo del Principato* (hereafter ASF, MdP) 1605, c. 243v.

<sup>11</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 242.

<sup>12</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, cc. 245 r–v.

<sup>13</sup> Giuseppe Gullino, *Donà, Giovanni Battista*, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, v.40 (Rome, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 249.

tailors sew the clothing for both travellers, using textiles, colours and accessories that highlight their social and professional standing:

One rust-coloured satin robe with gilded silver buttons. Another one of bright red silk from Chios with silver buttons and two of simple red Turkish cotton cloth [*boccacino* from the Turkish *boğası*], two Venetian damask doublets, a robe with a sable lining and one of Dutch cloth with a leather lining, a robe of English cloth, one of camel hair lined with bright red satin, two sable kalpaks and four pairs of babouches [*şabnuş*, slippers], two linen shirts and two [pairs of] breeches.<sup>15</sup>

The luxury textiles and fur fit with the cosmopolitan liveliness of Smyrna, which enchants Michelangelo Tilli with its extraordinary freedom, allowing Franks to walk around without a dragoman and to ‘dress in the French fashion as we do in Livorno, or to dress as Turks or wear a wig and a hat, and what is admirable is to see the Franks living in the best houses on the road facing the harbour where, if some Turk tried to provoke them, he would be soon chastised by the foreign merchants. Smyrna is the only place in the whole of the Levant where such freedom is allowed.’<sup>16</sup>

Eventually, the two travellers board a Turkish vessel sailing to Constantinople and a French doctor on board instructs Tilli on how to behave with the Ottoman admiral: ‘I took my shoes off before entering the room, and then we were seated on a sofa covered with carpets and with lots of big cushions around it. I immediately realised that this Turk was jovial and wished to please me in all possible ways because of the patient I was about to treat.’<sup>17</sup> They arrive in Constantinople on 26 May, but Paşa Mussaîp has already moved north to Belgrade with the army. The Venetian bailo oversees the gathering of information among his connections at court and in the European community and offers food and lodging. In his residence he has a staff of seven dragomans and six *giovani di lingua* (apprentice dragomans) learning Turkish and translating Ottoman literary texts to be printed in Venice. With the help of dragoman Gian Rinaldo Carli, Donà was planning a truly innovative book, *Della letteratura de’ Turchi* (Venice 1688), where, eschewing the dominant tradition focused on the Turk’s military power and religion, he offered readers an overview of Turkish academic *curricula* and literary culture in the framework of the European learned tradition of *genres* acknowledging a few editions and translations into some European languages and Latin. A wealth of unknown texts were discovered, translated, edited and printed in Italian for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, c. 250.

<sup>16</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 250v.

<sup>17</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, c. 247v.

<sup>18</sup> *Della Letteratura de’ Turchi. Osservationi fatte da Gio. Battista Donado senator Veneto, fu Bailo in Costantinopoli*, (Venezia: Andrea Poletti, 1688); E.Nathalie Rothman, ‘Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no.4 (2009): 771-800; E.Nathalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire, Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2012); Rothman, ‘Dragomans and “Turkish Literature”’; Eric Dursteler, ‘Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean’, *Past and Present*, 217, no.3 (2012):47-77.

‘The city appears almost empty and without any luxury, as the ministers and high ranking officers who with their courts and horses adorn the streets have all gone to the battlefield,’ Tilli writes to Florence. There is widespread opposition to the war even among the military, as many think that the army is not well enough trained and that its strength is only due to numbers, not skill.

Constantinople is perfectly healthy, he observes ‘and I can say that, visiting many houses and touching many pulses, I have not found a feverish one.’ As a carrier in Smyrna clumsily broke the three thermometers he had brought from Florence, he asks Redi to send him two as ‘I wish to use them on the Paşa, who is looking forward to this.’<sup>19</sup> On the 3d of June 1683 a messenger from the Paşa Mussaip court arrives in Constantinople with letters for the Venetian Bailo and summons Tilli and Pasquali to Belgrade. He needs the doctor to start treating his knee as soon as possible, as he has been unsuccessfully treated by local doctors and surgeons for 18 years.

‘I was summoned to the house of Asil, Mussaip’s brother in law,’ Tilli writes to Redi, where other relatives and Turks of high standing gathered. Asil read a medical report on the Paşa’s condition chapter after chapter while the dragoman translated it for me into Italian; they wanted me to enter a formal agreement’ and as they understood that I wanted to avoid it [...] they finally accepted my position and granted me a couple of weeks to prepare for the trip to Belgrade. They will give us three carriages, one for our luggage and pavilion and the other two for four people: doctor Benetti, a capable and bright *giovane di lingua* (apprentice dragoman) on the payroll of the Venetian Republic that will assist me with the language and the connections at the Paşa’s court, two servants and an Albanian postman who speaks Italian and is accustomed to these roads. We will also have a horse so that we can ride and not only sit in the carriage. Paşa Mussaip has charged a Turk to take care of all our expenses, and he has a retinue of 15 people all travelling with us to Mussaip’s court in Belgrade.’<sup>20</sup>

The Empire is getting ready for war. Paşas from Egypt and Syria gather with their troops, horses, camels and colorful pavilions in the valleys around Constantinople. While the journey to Belgrade is being organized, Tilli meets high ranking officials and effendis, visits the city and sails along the Bosphorus. His medical skills attract attention, and he is summoned with Benetti, his *giovane di lingua*, to visit Mussaip’s sister ‘who does not menstruate’:

Visiting a sick woman here is very different from the Italian style. When I was introduced into her apartment, two black eunuchs in total silence lifted one side of the silk curtain behind which she was hiding. The Lady put out her hand so that I could touch her pulse. I told her husband what I thought, and we went back to my living quarters.

<sup>19</sup> Firenze, Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana (hereafter: BML), *Redi* 212, c. 264v.

<sup>20</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c. 283.

Tilli and Pasquali also treat and heal the first gentleman of the court, and this gives them ‘some reputation’. In this city ‘there are many apothecary’s shops, writes Tilli, well furnished with the most common and simple remedies. There are also five or six doctors that graduated in Italy, and they earn very little because the Turks pay very badly, and to make a living every doctor must open an apothecary’.<sup>21</sup>

Talking to learned men and teachers, looking at European books in their libraries and reflecting on the outrageous costs of manuscripts owing to the lack of print and a printing business, Tilli comments on the lack of scientific training among the Ottomans. In Constantinople Academies are decreasing in number and offer no training in the sciences:

The Turks waste their youth studying languages, and after having learned to read and write Turkish they concentrate on learning Arabic which is a more elegant language and crucial for interpreting the Koran. Eventually they learn Persian for poetry, as their songs and prayers have many Persian words. After such a long training in languages, they reach maturity and have lost the energy of youth and do not want to engage with science, because they fear (as a Turk told me) that, being enlightened by science, they might convert to another religion.<sup>22</sup>

The Bailo shared more medical information and quickly got it translated from Italian into Turkish. The report revealed that the tissues in his knee (“scirro”) might be plagued with cancer, or a very large tumor may have dislocated his knee, a severe condition only exacerbated by the Paşa’s fall from his horse. The report concluded that the Paşa was eagerly waiting for the Tuscan physician who treated successfully the Granduke of Tuscany, as a letter sent to him from Cosimo III confirmed.

### **Belgrade**

After two more months of travel, on 24 July the physician and the surgeon reached Belgrade and received a warm welcome at the court of Mussaip Paşa, son-in-law of the Sultan. Tilli wrote to Redi:

I started giving the Paşa some light purgative medicament. He was very pleased with the definition of his illness which I took from the Greek Latin Lexicon and had translated into Turkish; he hoped that the same dictionary would prognose proper therapy. But I insisted that it will be extremely difficult to find this in a book, as the inflammation of the popliteus stemming from his condition cannot be treated with medicaments.<sup>23</sup>

The Greek Latin Lexicon was most probably The *Clavis sanationis* written in the XIII century by Simon of Genoa, a physician to pope Nicolas IV. It is a multilingual dictionary that covers medical terminology in Latin, Greek and Arabic still in use at the end of the seventeenth century everywhere in the world. Mussaip Paşa was a

<sup>21</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c. 271v, from Pera in Constantinople, 16 May 1683.

<sup>22</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c. 279.

<sup>23</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c.285.

learned man and a musician who also wrote poetry: Tilli approached him on the grounds of learning, using his training and competence in the field of medicine and philology. This approach probably established a lasting personal confidence between the physician and the patient.

He has been suffering from a painful discomfort in the knee for eighteen years. The same medicaments have been applied over and over. I think I shall choose those that will not make things worse, even if they have already been employed.<sup>24</sup>

Tilli decides to be prudent in the treatment of his patient, with the approval of his mentor Redi, who advises him to treat the pain with ointments and to avoid cutting, as this is always risky. For the next two months he is stationed in Belgrade. He observes the city, its beautiful streets and its multiethnic population speaking a variety of idioms:

In addition to the Turkish language, from Sofia onwards one hears the Slavic one, so that at Mass, after the priest has finished reading the gospel in Latin, the cleric sings in the Slavic language, and the priest replies accordingly, as he has a missal translated from Latin into the Illyrian idiom.<sup>25</sup>

According to Tilli, different lifestyles and religious practices coexist in Belgrade:

People here live partly in the German custom and partly in the Turkish: rooms have a stove to provide warmth in the freezing winters. People from different religions live together: the majority are Greek Orthodox Christians; then come the Turks, the Jews and the Roman Catholics. There are very many mosques and only two churches, a Greek and a Latin one. In the latter, three friars care for over 1,000 Catholics. When they leave the convent, they take off their tunics or cover them with Bulgarian-style clothes, especially when a simple friar with a servant visits the sick holding a lamp under his fur coat.<sup>26</sup>

Such religious healing practices that the doctor observes in town were popular not only among the Catholic minority. The Ottoman medical system comprised three different etiological and therapeutic traditions: humoralism filled the niche of learned medicine as it did in Europe. It enjoyed supremacy in urban communities, in the sultan's palaces and among the wider Ottoman élite, and its legitimacy rested in the Galenic textual tradition inherited from Greek antiquity.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the other two traditions, folkloric and Prophetic medicine, Muslim humoralism was theologically neutral in its attitude towards illness and health. However, as in other early modern Western medical systems, lay and religious healers and therapies were not perceived as incompatible alternatives, but rather as being in competition with one another. Should one tradition fail, the patient could resort to the other two. Therefore, healers could rarely justify

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<sup>24</sup> ASF, MdP.1605, c.252

<sup>25</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c. 234v.

<sup>26</sup> BML, *Redi* 212, c 234v.

<sup>27</sup> Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine. Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500–1700* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009) 23, 24.



the high level of financial rewards they expected, and humoral doctors could not necessarily demand the financial premium they believed befitted their long process of training and their theoretical knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Being embedded in the hierarchical Ottoman society, the realm of medicine acknowledged social and financial differences. Ottoman medicines offered multiple methods for getting better, but they were not available to all. For many Ottoman subjects, medical options were limited, and medicine was also a means of social demarcation that in turn helped to reinforce status distinctions. In early modern Italy, having a personal doctor, who often supervised an apothecary to make medicaments especially targeted to a private patient, was a luxury, as most of the population was treated in hospitals. This was also the case between doctor Tilli and Paşa Mussaip, whose social standing and political position entitled him to a privileged treatment.

In October the doctor sends some encouraging news to Florence: the knee tumour is getting smaller and the pain is no longer continuous, but intermittent. The Paşa feels great relief and believes that by applying the new medicaments by early Spring he will improve considerably and, therefore, he has not allowed doctor Michelangelo to leave.

His letters from Belgrade are also full of political information about the ‘confusion and trouble’ caused by the catastrophic defeat of the Ottoman army before Vienna in 1683. The Grand Vizier’s escaped to Buda, and the great number of casualties ‘caused by the Christian armies’:

However, we do not have any reliable information, as no one of considerable standing has appeared to inform us. In the last four days, we have begun to see some scattered groups of ragged soldiers, some looking wild, some with no weapons, barefoot, with their skin barely covering their bones. They pass by, and each one tries to get home as quickly as possible to forget about the war. They refuse to obey their commanders, who try to slow them down.<sup>29</sup>

A few days later, doctor Tilli writes to his mentor Redi with more information on his patient’s state of health and on the therapies:

I am now applying on his knee sheep entrails as well as a plaster made of broad-bean flour with some large boiled cabbage leaves, and on top of it butter and ointment. I go on applying light things every day according to the need to soften or to expel what has been softened. When I touch the tumour, it recedes slightly, but when I remove my finger it goes back to its original shape, as sponge-shaped tumours do. When he puts his foot on the ground, he feels a strong pain in the joints of the bone.<sup>30</sup>

Tilli asks Redi to send him ‘a pot of rose ointment, a small quantity of human fat and a small pot of oil for the nerves from the Medici Fonderia [i.e., the chemical and

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<sup>28</sup> Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c.235.

<sup>30</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c.255.

alchemic foundry in Florence where medicaments were distilled and prepared]; a very small quantity of perfumed quintessence to dilute in water would also be useful.<sup>31</sup>

These were the new medicaments that the Paşa was waiting for. Medicines were not only needed for Mussaip himself but for the court as well. Surgeon Pasquali, sick with malaria, was taking quinine, so 'I am now working as physician, surgeon and apothecary not only for the Paşa's court but also for those who have cunningly smuggled themselves into his retinue to enjoy these privileged treatments,' he tells his mentor, asking him to send more quinine and 'one hundred of your pills, but smaller than usual, so that instead of swallowing two of them, it is better to swallow three.'<sup>32</sup>

Because of the war, doctor Tilli hardly ever received what he asked for. The Paşa's court kept moving and this made things even more difficult. The routes through which medicaments were sent from Florence to Belgrade and later on to Adrianople (Edirne) went through Venice and Split or Ragusa. Painstaking instructions followed these precious small coffers through networks of kin, merchants and diplomatic agents. In January, the coffer that Tilli had requested in October arrived via Venice in Split, but there it was stopped and sent back to Venice as the Morlachs' rebellion against the Turks had blocked all inland roads around Split. And yet, because Paşa Mussaip seemed to be getting better with the ointment for the nerves, two coffers were prepared and shipped along two different routes: the first one with more medicines through Venice, and the second one, very small and containing only the oil, smuggled in the official correspondence of the Republic with the Sublime Porte via Ragusa. The medical equipment contained in the coffers was prepared in the Medici foundry (Fonderia) in Florence under Redi's supervision, and shipped all over the world: the letters mention the arrival of one of them in Goa and two in Transylvania, and Redi himself had them shipped to Mexico. Generally, they were gifts to rulers and courts, and also to convents and missionaries, so we can consider them 'positional goods' as they were meant to legitimise hierarchy and status rather than being sold on the market. The coffers were of different sizes and contained a varying number of medicaments, mainly oils, ointments and waters that could be swallowed and smeared over the ailing parts of the body. The twelve standard ingredients were: oil against poisoning, oil for the stomach, oil for wounds, oil against worms, oil against spasms, candied julep, water against colic, water for skin rash, ointment for burning, ointment for nerves, and clay. The box contained twelve recipes to make the necessary compounds, suited to the condition of the patient, to the climate and to the season. This 'recipe-book approach to pharmacy' rested on a synthesis of Greek and Arab science received through Medieval Latin editions.<sup>33</sup> In Florence, hospitals, doctors, consumers and apothecaries

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<sup>31</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, c.255.

<sup>32</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, cc.255-56.

<sup>33</sup> On the Fonderia medicea see Valentina Conticelli (a cura di), *L'Alchimia e le Arti. La Fonderia degli Uffizi da laboratorio a stanza delle meraviglie* (Firenze: Sillabe, 2012); James Shaw and Evelyne Welsh, *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence*, (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2011), 233–35.

assembled their own collection of recipes, and ingredients were also used for cheaper and popular medicaments.

Doctor Redi sent his pupil a recipe to make drinking water with jasmine, musk and citrus, hoping that he would not have to bear for too long the increased charge of treating the Paşa and all his court. But the effort was producing some positive results and Tilli writes: 'Paşa Mussaip is getting better and he now walks with a stick for eight or ten steps, something that he was never able to do in the past when he was in the hands of other physicians.'<sup>34</sup> Doctors at court 'hate me' he writes, especially those that come from the Porte and have unsuccessfully treated the Paşa in the past.<sup>35</sup>

### The Court retreats

On the 20 of September 1684 news of the defeat of the Ottoman army in Vienna reach Belgrade. The apprentice dragoman Benetti leaves a powerful description of how the news affected the city, the court and the Sultan himself. An astonished silence reigned everywhere, and slowly all the decorations that had been prepared for the expected victory were destroyed. 'Orders were given to doctor Tilli to prepare large amounts of almond and lettuce juice and other remedies that could help people to sleep'.<sup>36</sup> This public charge in times of calamity outlines the prestige Tilli had acquired. His medicaments had proved effective and the Paşa's appreciation for the doctor consolidated the *strettissima* (very close) friendship between Mussaip and the Bailo.<sup>37</sup>

At the end of October, following news from the battlefield, the courts of the Sultan and of the Paşa left Belgrade. Tilli wrote a long and detailed report to Florence describing what he saw and experienced: the colourful procession of soldiers, camels, and horses with rich decorations, followed by musicians playing their flutes, drums, trumpets and castanets in a 'confused harmony'.

I had to enjoy it - he comments with some irony - to benefit from the light of the torches more than from the uproar, and most of all I had to abide by the Paşa's wish that I travel safely, protected from the violence that can burst out in these narrow roads.<sup>38</sup>

He admires the carriages and the litters 'more for their luxury than for mechanical parts, as they are covered with solid silver.' The daughter of the Sultan, that had unusually followed her husband on the battlefield, has a retinue of ten carriages. At every stop, beautifully coloured pavilions are mounted and guarded by soldiers and eunuchs. But news from the battlefield, reporting two tragic defeats with the deaths of all but two of the Paşas, infuses a feeling of gloom in the narrative, as the court retreats:

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<sup>34</sup> BML, Redi 212, c. 257.

<sup>35</sup> BML, Redi 212, c.291.

<sup>36</sup> Antonio Benetti, *Viaggio a Costantinopoli di Gio. Battista Donado senator veneto spedito Bailo alla Porta Ottomana l'anno 1680. Sua permanenza, e ritorno in patria nel 1684. Osservati colla raccolta delle piu curiose notizie dal fu dottor Antonio Benetti, e dati in luce dal dottor Francesco Maria Pazzaglia*. Parte terza. (Venezia, per Andrea Poletti 1688), 107

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 132

<sup>38</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c.259

Passing again through Serbia and Bulgaria and entering Romania, we found that villages and towns were less populated and lacking fodder. In Bulgaria, soldiers burnt and destroyed those poor straw huts that happened to be along the roads. Others have been spontaneously abandoned by their poor inhabitants trying to find shelter from the troops and to hide in some lonely and fertile places, away from the immense and open fields.<sup>39</sup>

On 4 November, they arrive in Philippopolis (Plovdiv), a city full of nice houses where wealthy Turks and well-to-do Greeks live outside the walls of the old city. The Turks are more numerous than the Greeks and the Greeks are more numerous than the Jews. After a few days, Mussaîp Paşa and a small group of courtiers start moving in the direction of Edirne. At this stage, the court with its rituals, hierarchy and ostentation vanishes from Tilli's narrative. The doctor's gaze meets poor peasant families fighting for survival, as he looks for shelter every night in villages where huts are in deep snow:

The first night we stopped in Papalic, where I found shelter in the small hut of a Bulgarian widow, who lived miserably with her three children, whom she is bringing up in the true faith. Her poverty did not allow her to have oil or candles, but she had a supply of resinous bark that made enough light. The second night we stopped in Semischie, a village like the others, and we were hosted in a more comfortable hut where a Bulgarian woman lived with four small children, and they were also taught the Christian religion by their simple and illiterate parents. I admired their devotion: when my servant gave one of the children a piece of cheese, his mother did not allow him to eat it so as not to break the ritual fasting of one of their Greek Easters. This group of huts is 40 miles from Philippopolis and 60 from Adrianople; it has no Latin or Greek churches, and their poor inhabitants are compelled to travel together with all their children to one of these two cities to visit those poor monasteries, as in a pilgrimage. What rough education those poor people get, in these depopulated lands! The third night, our lodgings were better still, and our host was a Turk who had a good supply of wood. The fourth night another Turk hosted us in a house, and the fifth night we got to [Mustafa Paşa Cioprisi] a comfortable place with plenty of lodgings where a Turk tried his best not to let us in, as we were Christians. He had travelled to a Christian town, Split, on some business and saw that the Franks there threw holy water over the beds; therefore, he asked us with great emphasis not to throw anything mysterious in his home or to profane his belongings.<sup>40</sup>

At the beginning of November Paşa Mussaîp and his small group of courtiers reached Sofia and then Philippopolis. Tilli writes:

The woods around Sofia are full of corpses and among them are some poor German slaves who died of exhaustion, stuck in ice and snow, or killed each other for a piece of bread [...] the few Muslims that survived and made it back to their countries are telling

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<sup>39</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, from Edirne 8 December 1683

<sup>40</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, cc. 259-62.

so many miserable stories that they discourage all those that are destined to leave for the next military campaign.<sup>41</sup>

During the retreat, the Paşa's condition gets slightly worse, as he has to ride all day in deep snow, but after some rest he recovers.<sup>42</sup> At the beginning of December they reach Edirne.

**'He can now pray bending down on his knees'**

Tilli's reports are extremely well received in Florence where the Grand Duke immensely appreciates the wealth of information. More medicines have been shipped via Ragusa and a small box of ointment for the nerves has been mailed directly to the Venetian Bailo in Constantinople. A third small case has been shipped to Smyrna to a Tuscan agent. Paşa Mussaip is appointed Captain of the Imperial fleet in charge of all policies concerning the sea, the islands and the coastline. He will soon move to Istanbul and Tilli is looking forward to seeing many Franks again. Because of the war, all the coffers with the medicaments have been sent back to Venice and they are being shipped once more, this time to Smyrna on a Dutch Vessel. In February, they are back in Constantinople and doctor Tilli tries to get hold of the antiquities that the Grand Duke is longing for:

It is an extremely difficult task, as every ambassador here collects antiquities. On my way up to Belgrade, I asked in every village and every town and I was told that the Pope's *internuncio* had collected all ancient coins, good or bad. So I am left with a few rusty ones of little value.<sup>43</sup>

Paşa Mussaip is again about to leave, as his new charge of Captain of the Imperial fleet takes him to Chios, Negroponte and Smyrna. In April, Tilli starts making plans for his return to Tuscany:

His excellence Mussaip has enjoyed good health and feels very well. The constant pain he felt in his knee has left him, and he can use his leg a little, while until now it was paralysed. ...I left the Paşa at the beginning of July; he is free from all pain in the knee, and he can now pray bending down with his knees and head on the ground without the help of all the people that had to hold him on both sides. I am giving him no medication. He is now holding in his hands a small box with the ointment for nerves that was sent to me via Ragusa, and he immediately had the recipe that was inside it translated into Turkish.<sup>44</sup>

The Paşa writes a letter to Cosimo de' Medici, thanking him and acknowledging Tilli's medical skill. He pays the doctor 200 and surgeon Pasquali 100 *reali*. In April 1685 both are in Malta. The Paşa has given Tilli a box containing three Persian books: his network of informants told him that if

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<sup>41</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, c.262.

<sup>42</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c. 258.

<sup>43</sup>ASF, MdP 1605, c.267

<sup>44</sup> ASF, MdP 1605, c.271.

They are history books [...] they must be important. I have indeed heard that before the siege of Crete a Turkish effendi, a jurist, made a catalogue of all the books he happened to use in Turkish, Arabic and Persian, and they are approximately thirty or forty thousand; another learned man who read the catalogue estimated that the best books are the history books, and there are approximately 1,520 in Turkish, and all the other history books are in Arabic or Persian.<sup>45</sup>

In May the physician and the surgeon arrive in Messina, whence continuing on an English vessel, they landed in Livorno in June. The court in Florence is expecting them to appear in their Turkish clothes, but:

I regret not being able to satisfy everybody's curiosity, as I have taken off my Levantine garb. In Malta I had already shaved my beard: it was so hot, and I could not stand the large trousers, leather kalpak and all that one wears in the summer in Constantinople where a fresh wind blows all the time. Had I known you were expecting to see me in my foreign clothing, I would have stood all the discomfort in order to appear with a beard and in the fashion of the Levant, where I disguised myself as a Turk, or a Frank or a Tartar or possibly as an Italian, adapting myself to the most honourable and good looking style.<sup>46</sup>

Doctor Tilli's work in his multiple roles as political informant, physician and acute observer was highly rewarded. In 1685 he was appointed director of the Botanical Gardens of the University of Pisa replete with a considerable salary. He also became a member of the Royal Society in London. Going to the Ottoman Empire gave him a good chance of upward mobility. News of his success in treating Paşa Mussaip spread across the Empire, and a couple of years later, he sailed from Livorno to Tunis, to cure yet another powerful pasa.

### **Concluding remarks**

The story of Michelangelo Tilli is shaped by a brief (1683–85) but nevertheless macro-spatial scale and an exceptional political and military context. As the title of this paper suggests, the young physician was expected to fulfil multiple roles: that of a healer, political informant, observer of naturalia and collector of antiquities. He was also expected to come back speaking fluent Turkish.

Going through his correspondence with Francesco Redi, I discovered that the head physician at the Medici Court was also overseeing two other Tuscan scientists – Giovanni Pagni and Alessandro Pini – travelling in Tunis, Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Aleppo. This rare constellation of little-known figures and exchanges resonates with current historiographical discussions on connected histories, a rethinking of Orientalism as linked to modern imperial power, and on the circulation of people and

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<sup>45</sup> ASF, MdP 1606, c. 166.

<sup>46</sup> ASF, MdP 1606, c.170

goods in a globalising world.<sup>47</sup> The correspondences shed light on fields and practices of knowledge and on little-known travelling Italian scientists who were part of diplomatic, scientific and political networks. Focusing on their lives and letters addresses research strategies that investigate ways to integrate microhistorical approaches and case studies into transnational/translocal history. This encourages us, as Francesca Trivellato writes, ‘to think creatively outside the “box” of civilisations [...] juxtapose[ing] micro- and macro-units of analysis.’<sup>48</sup>

Tilli’s correspondence offers a rare insight into medical practice. As in many early modern Western societies, pluralism characterised the Ottoman medical system, in which folk, religious and medical healers competed for clients. However, we need a nuanced approach in applying notions of medical marketplace and consumption to early modern societies. Medical pluralism did not mean free competition where consumers could choose from a range of different products and suppliers, offering competitive prices. Studies of early modern health professionals and medical cures point to the crucial importance of social relations, credit and cooperation.<sup>49</sup> On the part of the patients, being able to obtain medicines and care meant being well-connected. Gift-giving shaped Tilli’s medical practice in the Ottoman Empire: the 300 *reali* the physician and surgeon received for what seemed to be a satisfactory therapy were more a gift than a salary, and so were the medicines, travelling incessantly and hopelessly from Florence to Venice to Split or Ragusa. The coffer from the Medici foundry was a gift sent to rulers and missionaries in distant parts of the world. In this perspective, European doctors were important agents in transnational networks of information and in the circulation of scientific practice and knowledge. They were also members of the République des Lettres embedded in court societies where medicines, naturalia and antiquities shaped exchanges between the Europeans and the Ottomans, bringing to light shared knowledge while enhancing status and prestige.

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<sup>47</sup> Sonja Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries: seeking, transforming, discarding knowledge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Alistair Hamilton, Jan Loop and Charles Burnett eds, *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Boston: Brill 2017); Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Islamic Letters*.

<sup>48</sup> De Vito, ‘Verso una microstoria translocale (micro-spatial history)’; Trivellato, ‘Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?’

<sup>49</sup> Sandra Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy: Identities, Families, Masculinities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey (eds), *Conserving health in Early Modern Culture: Bodies and Environments in Italy and England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).